

CALIFORNIA WILDLIFE HABITAT RELATIONSHIPS SYSTEM
maintained by the
CALIFORNIA DEPARTMENT OF FISH AND GAME
and supported by the
CALIFORNIA INTERAGENCY WILDLIFE TASK GROUP
Database Version 8.1 (2005)

B324 Vermilion Flycatcher *Pyrocephalus rubinus*
Family: Tyrannidae Order: Passeriformes Class: Aves

Written by: D. Gaines
Reviewed by: L. Mewaldt
Edited by: R. Duke
Updated by: CWHR Program Staff, August 2005

DISTRIBUTION, ABUNDANCE, AND SEASONALITY

A rare, local, yearlong resident along the Colorado River, especially in vicinity of Blythe, Riverside Co. A few still breed sporadically in desert oases west and north to Morongo Valley and the Mojave Narrows, San Bernardino Co. Formerly bred, at least sporadically, in coastal San Diego Co. (1958-1969). Nesters inhabit cottonwood, willow, mesquite, and other vegetation in desert riparian habitat adjacent to irrigated fields, irrigation ditches, pastures and other open, mesic areas in isolated patches throughout central southern California. Formerly much more common and widespread, but has disappeared almost entirely from Imperial and Coachella valleys, and numbers have declined drastically along Colorado River as well, primarily because of loss of habitat. This species faces extirpation in California if present trend continues (Grinnell and Miller 1944, Gaines 1977c, Remsen 1978, Garrett and Dunn 1981).

SPECIFIC HABITAT REQUIREMENTS

Feeding: Sallies for flying insects, especially bees, from exposed perches on outer portions of low trees, shrubs, and tall herb stalks, or picks insects from ground. Frequently feeds just above water surface. Regurgitates pellets (Bent 1942).

Cover: Trees and large shrubs afford nesting and roosting sites, and other cover.

Reproduction: Nest a compact, open cup of twigs, fine grasses, rootlets, bound with spider silk. Built in the fork of a horizontal branch in willow, cottonwood, mesquite, or other large tree or shrub. Nest height generally 2.5 to 6.2 m (8-20 ft), rarely to 15.5 m (50 ft) above ground (Bent 1942, Tinkham 1949).

Water: Breeds and forages near water (Grinnell and Miller 1944), typically irrigated fields, ditches, ponds, sloughs. Water probably essential.

Pattern: Most numerous where riparian thickets edge on open, mesic habitats.

SPECIES LIFE HISTORY

Activity Patterns: Yearlong, diurnal activity.

Seasonal Movements/Migration: Apparently mostly a resident, but probably withdraws from Mojave Desert oases in severe winters.

Home Range: No information found.

Territory: No information found.

Reproduction: Monogamous; peak of egg-laying probably April and May. Incubation, by female, 14-15 days. Clutch averages 3 eggs (range 2-4); often raises 2 broods. Both sexes care for altricial young. Fledging age 14-16 days (Bent 1942, Taylor and Hanson 1970).

Niche: Uncommon host to brown-headed cowbird nest parasitism; one record as host to bronzed cowbird (Friedmann 1963).

REFERENCES

- Bent, A. C. 1942. Life histories of North American flycatchers, larks, swallows, and their allies. U.S. Natl. Mus. Bull. 179. 555pp.
- De Benedictis, P. 1966. The flight song display of two taxa of vermilion flycatcher, genus *Pyrocephalus*. Condor 68:606-607.
- Friedmann, H. 1963. Host relations of the parasitic cowbirds. U.S. Natl. Mus. Bull. 233. 276pp.
- Gaines, D. 1977c. The status of selected riparian forest birds in California. A preliminary survey and review. Calif. Dep. Fish and Game, Sacramento. 72pp.
- Garrett, K., and J. Dunn. 1981. Birds of southern California. Los Angeles Audubon Soc. 408pp.
- Grinnell, J., and A. H. Miller. 1944. The distribution of the birds of California. Pac. Coast Avifauna No. 27. 608pp.
- Remsen, J. V., Jr. 1978. Bird species of special concern in California. Calif. Dep. Fish and Game, Sacramento. Wildl. Manage. Admin. Rep. No. 78-1. 54pp.
- Taylor, W. K., and H. Hanson. 1970. Observations on the breeding biology of the vermilion flycatcher in Arizona. Wilson Bull. 82:315-319.
- Tinkham, E. R. 1949. Notes on the nest-building of the vermilion flycatcher. Condor 51:230-231.